

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 03238 271442Z

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /057 W

----- 016204

R 261216Z AUG 76

FM AMMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5685

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE COLOMBO 3238

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: NEWSPAPER JOKE PROVOKES GOVERNMENT

1. A PRACTICAL JOKE AIMED AT PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE AND PRINTED IN THE AFTERNOON OBSERVER NEWSPAPER AUGUST 23 HAS RESULTED IN THE FIRING OF ONE REPORTER AND THE TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF SEVEN OTHERS, INCLUDING APPARENTLY SUCH JOURNALISTIC HEAVYWEIGHTS AS MERYVN DE SILVA, EDITORIAL ADVISORS TO THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED LAKE HOUSE NEWSPAPER CHAIN, AND PHILIP COORAY, EDITOR OF WEEKLY CEHLON NEWS, ANOTHER LAKE HOUSE ORGAN.

2. PRACTICAL JOKE TOOK THE FORM OF FRONT-PAGE "MAN-IN-THE STREET" ARTICLE QUOTING THREE HOUSEWIVES WHO PRAISED FULSOMELY PRIME MINISTER AND HER HANDLING OF SUMMIT, IN GENERAL TONE OF SELF-CONGRATULATION THAT HAS BEEN SO PROMINENT IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES SINCE SUMMIT ENDED. IN FACT, NAMES OF ALL THREE WOMEN "INTERVIEWED" HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM OBITUARY COLUMNS OF THAT MORNING'S CEYLON DAILY NEWS (ALSO LAKE HOUSE). WHEN THIS WAS DISCOVERED TWO DAYS LATER, OBSERVER APOLOGIZED AND ANNOUNCED FIRING OF REPORTER, GAMINI WINDSOR. THE SUSPENSIONS HAVE NOT BEEN FORMALLY ANNOUNCED BUT WE HEAR OF THEM FROM THREE SEPARATE SOURCES.

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3. COMMENT: DISCIPLINARY ACTION TAKEN IN THIS BROUHAHA REFLECTS

NOT ONLY PRIME MINISTER'S PRESUMED DISPLEASURE BUT ALSO
LAKE HOUE AND NATIONAL POLITICS. DE SILVA HAS BEEN OUT OF FAVOR
FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND PLAYED AN INSIGNIFICANT
ROLE DURING NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE .WE SPECULATE
THAT OPPORTUNITY HAS BEEN TAKEN TO CLEAR OUT OF
LAKE HOUSE BEFORE GENERAL ELECTION OR AT LEAST
CAUTION THOSE WHOSE LOYALTY TO PRIME MINISTER AND LAKE
HOUSE EDITOR A.K. PREMADASA MIGHT BE QUESTIONABLE.
THE QUICK PUNISHMENT METED OUT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S
WARNING THAT SUCH TRADITIONAL NEWSPAPER POLITICAL
ANTICS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED THIS YEAR.HOWEVER, SOME
JOURNALISTS ARE BOLDER THAN EVER, PLACING THEIR BETS
ON A GOVERNMENT CHANGE IN GENERAL ELCTION AND KNOWING
THAT THE FIRED TODAY IS THE HERO TOMORROW.

4. INTERESTINGLY, IT WAS COMMUNIST/MOSCOW WING
SINHALA DAILY ATTHA WHICH BROKE STORY OF HOAX TO FURTHER
PUBLIC EMBARRASSMENT OF PRIME MINISTER.
ATTHA AIMED ITS FIRE AT SINOPHILE LAKE HOUSE CHAIRMAN
PREMADASA AND OBSERVER EDITOR LIONEL FERNANDO
BUT THOSE DISCIPLINED, DE SILVA AND CREW,WERE ON
PREMADASA'S BLACK LIST.
REED

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CENSORSHIP, THE PRESS, PERSONNEL SEPARATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: blochd0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976COLOMB03238
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760327-0678
From: COLOMBO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760818/aaaaapae.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: blochd0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 JUL 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <21 OCT 2004 by blochd0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEWSPAPER JOKE PROVOKES GOVERNMENT
TAGS: PINT, CE, (WINDSOR, GAMINI), (DE SILVA, MERYVN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006